

**The Report of the
Accreditation Visiting Team**

**Falcon Ridge Academy
633 East Highway 9
Virgin, Utah 84779**

July 28, 2005



**Utah State Office of Education
250 East 500 South
P.O. Box 144200
Salt Lake City, Utah 84114-4200**

**THE REPORT OF THE
VISITING TEAM REVIEWING**

**Falcon Ridge Academy
633 East Highway 9
Virgin, Utah 84779**

July 28, 2005

UTAH STATE OFFICE OF EDUCATION

**Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Public Instruction**

**DIVISION OF
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND SCHOOL SUCCESS**

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Salt Lake City, Utah

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FOREWORD

The major purpose of the accreditation process is to stimulate school growth and improvement so as to increase student achievement.

In these efforts, the school staff makes a comprehensive evaluation of the school's programs, operations, and results. The school determines how actual practices align to stated objectives and resulting outcomes. It is a three-phased evaluation: (1) self-evaluation, (2) on-site evaluation by an external team of educators, and (3) implementation using units of the evaluation to improve the school by effecting thoughtful change.

The evaluation, July 28, 2005, was conducted because of the school's desire to ensure quality education for all students in the school, and to increase student achievement.

The entire staff of Falcon Ridge Academy is commended for the time and effort devoted to studying and evaluating the various facets of the total program and to preparing the materials used by the Visiting Team. The excellent leadership given by Principal Katherine Whittekiend and Joette Hayden, Director of Education, is also commended.

The staff and administration are congratulated for their desire for excellence at Falcon Ridge Academy, and also for the professional attitude of all members of the group, which made it possible for them to see areas of weakness and strength and to suggest procedures for bringing about improvements.

While these recommendations may be used to solicit financial support to acquire some of the materials, equipment, and services needed to carry out a more effective program, it is even more important that the faculty and administration utilize them as they continue to evaluate and modify course offerings and administrative and classroom procedures to more dramatically increase student achievement at Falcon Ridge Academy.

Patti Harrington, Ed.D.
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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1/3/2005

FALCON RIDGE ACADEMY

Administration

Principal Katherine Whittekiend
Program Director Melanie Habibian
Owners Frank and Melanie Habibian
Director of Education..... Joette Hayden

Educational Personnel

Adam Baker Library Media & Technology
Carole Bell Therapist, Equine Management
Robert Bell Equine Management
Leslie Budd Therapist
Kandis Farnsworth PE, Health
Rachel Fawson Teaching Assistant
Tamandra Fawson Therapist
Evelyn Ishom Music, Band
Mary Ann Murphy Vocational Studies, Art
Brian Pace School Counseling
Jennifer Sawyers Special Education Core Teacher
Holly Schick Teaching Assistant
Karen Slack Case Manager
Saddie Stratton Core Teacher

FALCON RIDGE ACADEMY

MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission at Falcon Ridge Academy is to help students acquire and build a strong foundation of knowledge that will enable each individual to succeed both academically and socially.

BELIEF STATEMENTS

At Falcon Ridge Academy, the teachers, administrators and other personnel believe that:

- All students have the right to be treated with respect and caring.
- All students can succeed and learn when given the appropriate academic and behavioral support.
- Curriculum needs to be modified to best meet the varying needs of our students.
- Educational planning should be student driven and supported by the educational team.
- All students can grow socially and become better prepared to contribute to society.

MEMBERS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Ralph P. Vander Heide, Ph.D., Consultant in School Accreditation,
Visiting Team Chairperson

Judith H. Vander Heide, M.S., Consultant in School Accreditation

VISITING TEAM REPORT

FALCON RIDGE ACADEMY

CHAPTER 1: SCHOOL PROFILE

Falcon Ridge Academy is located in Virgin, Utah, within 10 miles of Zion National Park. A twelve-acre ranch complete with trees, green pastures, and majestic rock cliffs surrounds the Academy. It is a state-licensed residential treatment facility for female adolescents, ages twelve to eighteen, who are experiencing behavioral and emotional problems that require a level of structure and care beyond that which is available in traditional outpatient clinics.

The facility was originally the home of the Snow family of Virgin, Utah. The main house was built approximately 28 years ago, and was added to as the years went by. In the 1980s, the Snow family sold the property to the Penrose family, who then turned the ranch into a working bed and breakfast/trail ride business. This venture was a huge success, with many repeat visitors from all over the world coming to see the sights of Zion National Park. In 1999, the bed and breakfast was sold to a private owner who started working with troubled youth and made the ranch into a residential home. In 2000, Red Rock Canyon School acquired the ranch and further developed the property into what it is today.

a) *What significant findings were revealed by the school's analysis of its profile?*

The school discovered significant findings about each student, since each is carefully profiled in order to individualize instruction to the extent possible and to help students with their psychological and behavioral issues. The Visiting Team notes that Falcon Ridge adequately portrays the school population, environment, curriculum, and other relevant information about the school, with emphasis on its mission, philosophy, and educational and rehabilitative direction for each student.

The school's analysis of the profile includes the identification of its strengths and limitations, and for the most part it provides a description of the "big picture" about the performance of the school. Profile information was used in drafting the school's improvement plan.

The Visiting Team notes that in preparing the profile the school followed the guidelines of the National Study of School Evaluation (NSSE) and the NSSE handbook, *School Improvement: Focusing on Student Performance*, as well as the Utah accreditation handbook, *Collaborating for Student Achievement*.

b) *What modifications to the school profile should the school consider for the future?*

The Visiting Team commends the profile information that is given. The data given includes assessments (achievement, exit, observation, participation, and perception) and artifacts (external communications, materials, organizational documents, and records).

The school is reminded to continue to put its best foot forward and to profile thoroughly.

CHAPTER 2: THE SELF-STUDY PROCESS

- a) *To what extent has the school community engaged in a collaborative self-study process on behalf of students?*

The faculty and staff at Falcon Ridge Academy believe parents are an integral part of the program and an essential element of the therapeutic process. They, along with all stakeholders, are part of the highly collaborative process.

- b) *To what extent does the school's self-study accurately reflect the school's current strengths and limitations?*

This has been described in Chapter 1 above.

CHAPTER 3: INSTRUCTIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

Falcon Ridge Academy's desired results for student learning (DRSLs) are as follows:

- Personal and Social Responsibility
- Expanding and Integrating Knowledge
- Learning to Learn Skills

The school staff engaged in a thorough procedure for determining the DRSLs. The staff and SIP team used the "Survey of Goals for Student Learning" published by the National Study of School Evaluation, as well as observation of student achievement and educational research, to determine the learning needs of students.

The Visiting Team observed that several indicators of student achievement are given for each DRSL so that progress can be measured. An example of one indicator is as follows: “Students connect knowledge from different subject areas” (DRSL 2 “Expanding and Integrating Knowledge”).

Shared Vision, Beliefs, Mission, and Goals:

- a) *To what extent did the school facilitate a collaborative process to build a shared vision for the school (mission) that defines a compelling purpose and direction for the school?*

Falcon Ridge Academy is to be commended for its collaborative effort. The self-study points out that “it was of utmost importance for our school to have a shared vision for student learning, and to be working with unity to improve academic excellence.” Stakeholders met regularly as part of the self-study process. Beliefs, mission, and DRSLs were a result of the collaborative approach. The mission statement does indeed describe a compelling purpose and direction for the school.

Stakeholders appear to understand that they must work their way through problems of instructional practice at ever-increasing levels of complexity and demand.

- b) *To what extent has the school defined a set of beliefs that reflect the commitment of the administration and staff to support student achievement and success?*

This has been well accomplished (see the list of beliefs at the beginning of this report). The school beliefs address key issues pertinent to effective decision making and policy development. It appears that the implications of the school’s belief statements and the level of the school’s conviction to act upon the beliefs were considered prior to finalizing the list of beliefs.

- c) *To what extent do the school's mission and beliefs align to support the school's desired results for student learning (DRSLs)?*

The mission and beliefs align as recommended by NSSE. The Visiting Team observed that the analysis of students’ learning needs takes into account the profile data and related assessment and evaluation measures of student learning. The expectations for student learning reflect meaningful and appropriately challenging goals. They are free of jargon, and all stakeholders can understand the clear and concise language.

Curriculum Development:

- a) *To what extent does the staff work collaboratively to ensure the curriculum is based on clearly defined standards and the Utah Core Curriculum (with inclusion of the Utah Life Skills)?*

The curriculum is based on the Utah Core, and teachers work together to meet and modify the core as needed for the school's unique population. The Utah Life Skills are a part of the curriculum. Standards for appropriate learning for the varying abilities guide the development of curriculum.

- b) *To what extent does the teaching staff work collaboratively to support the development of a curriculum that focuses on the school's desired results for student learning?*

The staff consistently works together to assure that the Core Curriculum is taught in such a manner as to meet the needs of the school's unique student body. All faculty members concur in focusing on the school-wide DRSLs as part of their teaching assignment.

Quality Instructional Design:

- a) *To what extent does the professional staff design and implement a variety of learning experiences that actively engage students?*

Teachers have learned that they must be creative and innovative with this student population, and help with the rehabilitation of students as well as their academic needs. Teachers are very much aware that instructional time must be protected and appropriately allocated to support learning. The Visiting Team encourages the teaching staff to continue and improve this endeavor.

- b) *To what extent do the professional staff and leadership provide additional opportunities which support student learning?*

The students engage in several appropriate "additional opportunities" such as sports, equine therapy, and community service, as well as activities that directly support the curriculum. An integral part of the school program provides many opportunities for students to improve and enrich their learning through expanded use of time, facilities and instructional resources.

The Visiting Team observed that such adjunct activities are listed in the self-study, along with two "thank you" letters from recipients of help and comments from the students on the value of the community service (cleaning the cemetery, tying quilts, canning, highway cleanup, sandbagging, and much more). The town has honored students with a dinner.

Quality Assessment Systems:

- a) *To what extent has the staff developed classroom or school-wide assessments based on clearly articulated expectations for student achievement?*

The development of assessments of student learning is based on a clear definition of the type of achievement to be assessed and the performance standards for evaluating the quality of students' achievement. Assessment is both formative and summative. It appeared to the Visiting Team that assessments are fair, equitable, creative, and varied. Teachers attempt to individualize assessment.

Leadership for School Improvement:

- a) *To what extent does the school leadership promote quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning?*

The "Consulting Principal" is a competent educational leader who understands the importance of promoting and fostering quality instruction. Although she does not visit the school every day, she makes regularly scheduled appearances and is frequently in telephone contact with the faculty and other administrators. She encourages decision making that is data-driven, research-based, and individualized. She also, along with other administrators (see the list in the front of this report), provides skillful stewardship by ensuring management of the organization, operations and resources of the school for a safe, efficient and effective learning environment. She monitors the work of the teachers and checks on the progress of the students.

The school leadership promotes quality instruction by fostering an academic learning climate and actively supporting teaching and learning.

Community Building:

- a) *To what extent does the school foster community building and working relationships within the school?*

As noted throughout this report, community building is part of the ethos of Falcon Ridge. Positive and productive working relationships are established among students, teachers, support staff, and administrators.

- b) *To what extent does the school extend the school community through collaborative networks that support student learning?*

As noted above, the school participates in community projects and service learning, which is an integral part of the program.

Culture of Continuous Improvement and Learning:

- a) *To what extent does the school build skills and the capacity for improvement through comprehensive and ongoing professional development programs focused on the school's goals for improvement?*

This is commendably accomplished at Falcon Ridge Academy.

- b) *To what extent does the school create conditions that support productive change and continuous improvement?*

The school is committed to progressive change. Of course, a principle concern is to help these youngsters with their personal problems in order that they may better achieve academically.

CHAPTER 4: NORTHWEST ASSOCIATION OF ACCREDITED SCHOOLS (NAAS) STANDARDS I-XI

Standard I – Educational Program

Falcon Ridge meets all four sections of this standard. The educational program is aligned with the mission statement and beliefs. The Visiting Team observed that the vision for the school has been collaboratively developed (see Chapter 3). The instructional and organizational practices, as well as the policies and procedures, support the desired results for student learning and prepare students to succeed in a culturally diverse, democratic society. The program of studies meets the requirements of the state.

Standard II – Student Personnel Services

All three sections of this standard are met. Personnel services are designed to give appropriate systematic assistance to students as called for in the subsections of the requirements. The assigned personnel for guidance includes a minimum of one full-time person for each 400 students enrolled. (Of course, Falcon Ridge Academy has only 12 students.)

The primary objective of the counseling/therapy program is to promote and enhance the academic and personal development of students and to prepare them for post-high school experiences. Therapy helps the students to understand impediments to academic achievement that have occurred in their lives due to their behavioral issues.

Standard III – School Plant and Equipment

The beautiful ranch building in a lovely setting provides for a variety of instructional activities and programs, and incorporates aesthetic features that contribute to a positive educational atmosphere. It provides for the health and safety of students and all school faculty and personnel. This standard is met.

Standard IV – Library Media Program

The school meets the five sections of this standard. The school library media program is a modest resource for literacy, information, and curriculum support. It contributes to the achievement of the DRSLs. A certified library media teacher (part-time consultant) advises and helps with library improvement. Sufficient funds are provided each year to meet the library/media needs of students and teachers. Ongoing improvement of the library should be a concern of all stakeholders.

Standard V – Records

This standard is met. Student records are maintained, handled, and protected in the best interests of students and parents. Students and parents have the right to access personal student records and are ensured the privacy of such, as guaranteed by federal legislation.

Standard VI – School Improvement (This is addressed in the self-study.)

The five sections of this standard are met. The school improvement plan focuses on the total school rather than each of the separate components within the school. Systematic analysis of data regarding the performance of students has been incorporated into the comprehensive school improvement process, as has ongoing examination of instructional practices. The plan is updated and adjusted each year in alignment with perceived needs. The leadership is very much aware that improvement is a process, not an event, and urges the faculty to generate a sense of internal accountability.

Standard VII – Preparation of Personnel

This standard is met. All professional personnel are in compliance with the licensing requirements of the state of Utah and are endorsed or properly (temporarily) exempted for the subjects they are teaching.

Standard VIII – Administration

This standard is met. The administration of Falcon Ridge Academy provides educational leadership, supervises and coordinates programs, and carries out the necessary and required administrative procedures.

Standard IX – Teacher Load

This standard is met. The total number of students instructed by any one teacher in any one grading period does not exceed numbers set by the Utah State Office of Education and/or NAAS.

Standard X – Activities

This standard is well met. As noted, the school supports a range of activities that supplement and augment the basic instructional program by providing additional enriching experiences for students consistent with the school's mission and beliefs. Attention is paid to providing equal opportunities.

Standard XI – Business Practices

This standard is met. The school is financially responsible. Proper budgetary procedures and generally accepted accounting principles are followed for all school funds. The school's advertising and promotional literature are completely truthful and ethical.

CHAPTER 5: SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS – ACTION PLAN

- a) *To what extent is the school-wide action plan adequate in addressing the critical areas for follow-up?*

The plan appears to be adequate and understood by all stakeholders. There is school-wide commitment to the action plan, and follow-up procedures are sound. The Visiting Team assumes that the plan will achieve the desired outcomes. School personnel intend to change and modify it as needed. The school followed the suggested format of NSSE.

The recommended format is to have complete alignment (profiling—establishing beliefs—mission statement derived from beliefs—analysis of how the school is operating—establishment of DRSLs based on profiling, mission and beliefs—an action plan that addresses the DRSLs).

CHAPTER 6: MAJOR COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VISITING TEAM

Commendations:

- The Visiting Team commends all stakeholders, but especially the Director of Education, for preparation of the thorough self-study.
- The Visiting Team commends all personnel and students for their hospitality and cooperation with the Visiting Team.
- The Visiting Team commends all personnel for their honesty concerning the academic programs at Falcon Ridge Academy and for their willingness to improve.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their enthusiasm and apparent devotion to improving the lives of the students i.e., for their commitment to the mission statement and beliefs and the principles of “Positive Peer Culture.”
- The Visiting Team commends the administration, therapists, and faculty for the practice of holding regular meetings to discuss all aspects of the ongoing program of the school.
- The Visiting Team commends all school personnel for their effort to design IEPs for the students, and for fostering a nurturing but goal-directed atmosphere.
- The Visiting Team commends school personnel for providing noteworthy activities in service learning.
- The Visiting Team commends the teachers for the examples of competent teaching that the Visiting Team observed.
- The Visiting Team commends the owners for maintaining a beautiful environment, which is most conducive to learning.

Recommendations:

- The Visiting Team recommends that in future self-studies, the school profile offer even more information and data including follow-up studies on students who have completed their stay at Falcon Ridge.
- The Visiting Team recommends that all stakeholders continue to expand the library with appropriate materials.

- The Visiting Team recommends that all stakeholders remain committed to a process of continuous improvement (without being “sidetracked”—as stated in the self-study).
- The Visiting Team recommends that commitment to professional development be specific to identified needs.

Lastly, the school is reminded that accreditation provides reasonable assurance about the quality of opportunities available to students who attend the school. A primary purpose of accreditation is to protect the public trust. Accreditation promotes voluntary self-regulation, and is a means of showing confidence in a school’s performance (i.e., that both quantitative and qualitative standards have been established). An ultimate objective of the self-study and accreditation process should be that schools institutionalize the process of reflective inquiry and thereby become internally responsible for the maintenance of standards—even the creation of standards. The Visiting Team anticipates that Falcon Ridge Academy will continue the process of self-evaluation and ongoing improvement.